

ERROR ANALYSIS ON THE SPOKEN ENGLISH OF FBIB STUDENTS: A PRELIMINARY RESEARCH¹

Liliek Soepriatmadji²

Abstract

A study on error in English language use has long been conducted by different researchers and in different settings (Richards 1971; Nemser 1971; Selinker 1972; Brown 1994; Ellis 1995). Different English educational institutions continuously conduct similar studies mainly because they do not only want to identify linguistic problems encountered by their students and to account for their language development but they also want to benefit from the necessary information they may use to better the learning materials (Farooq 1998; Bartlett 2002). In this study the writer investigated grammatical errors as encountered in students' spoken English. Thirty English students of the Faculty of Language and Cultural Studies Stikubank University were randomly asked to speak about any issue they were interested in. This was recorded and the data were transcribed and categorized under (1) the type of grammatical errors, (2) problem areas, (3) Selinker's error categories (1972) and (4) semantic impacts. The most problems encountered by the students are as follows: verb phrase (24.6%), syntax (78.7%), transfer of training and strategy of language learning (77.1%) and local semantic impact (92.6%).

Key words: grammatical error, error category, problem area, semantic impact

BACKGROUND

English is not a new subject to the second semester students of English of S1 and D3 programs of FBIB Stikubank University. They have studied the language since they were at the junior and senior high schools. Even some students began learning the language when they were at the elementary schools.

When they were at the junior and senior high schools the schools employed a competence-based curriculum not a school-based (content-based) curriculum as is recently developed at the secondary education. This later curriculum is expected to help the high school graduates to possess certain competencies in each school subject. As for the English lesson, high school graduates are expected to possess standard competence which covers fluent and appropriate spoken and written communicative competences (Depenas, 2004: 5). These competences are realized in the four language skills and are integrated with their ability in expressing their interpersonal, ideational and textual meanings through different kinds of monologic and dialogic spoken and written discourses.

¹ A research report rewritten in a journal format

² A lecturer of FBIB Unisbank Semarang

Theoretically the competence-based curriculum is based on a model of language education introduced by Celce-Murcia et al. (Depenas, 2004: 1). The model is a communication-based model which facilitates the high school graduates with communicative competence which is supported by the discourse competence, linguistic competence, actional competence, socio-cultural competence, and strategic competence that high school graduates must be completely ready to live in any English speaking community.

Based on the objective condition of education in Indonesia and the status English as a foreign language (Depenas, 2004: 3) everyone may agree that the focus of literacy for high school graduates is *informational*. This level of literacy enables the high school graduates to possess ability to access knowledge and communicate it to others (Hammond 1992; Wells 1987). These high school graduates are now part of the English students of Stikubank University. With their informational literacy added up with enough English exposure, either in formal or informal setting, during their two-semester study at the English department, they may develop their informational literacy to lower epistemic literacy that they can use to write and communicate scientific or academic writing. In fact many second semester students still demonstrate inappropriate linguistic competence even at the performative literacy level, such as *Don't sick his heart, Will you can do it?, I exam to doctor, I sport in morning, I am work now*, etc.

Research on error in language use has been conducted many times but in different settings with different purposes. Mohideen (1996), for instance, conducted a similar research in order to provide a remedial written exercise to students of International Islamic University of Malaysia. Farooq (1998) and Bartlett (2002) conducted a similar research to get the necessary information they may use to better the learning materials. This research, therefore, as driven by the phenomena encountered in the students' spoken English tries to critically account for the students' spoken errors. It is, to the writer's opinion, a preliminary study that should be followed up with a further related research which aims at developing the students' communicative competence such as an action research.

Research questions

The main research question in this study is: "What kinds of error were committed by English students of Stikubank University in the first year of their course of study when they communicate in English?"

However, the above research question is further developed into the following sub-research questions in order to facilitate the process of analysis.

- (1) On grammatical categories, what errors were produced by students in their spoken English?
- (2) On error theoretical framework offered by Selinker (1972), what categories of error did the students commit?
- (3) What may cause students to commit errors when they communicate in English?
- (4) What semantic impact did the errors have upon the meaning of the utterances of which the errors occurred?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

English is the first foreign language taught from elementary education to tertiary education in Indonesia. The status of English language teaching and learning results in insufficient English exposure to any student that they can not quickly develop their English because their opportunity to use English is limited up to the time allotment scheduled weekly. They rarely use English as the means of instruction but rather as the object of discussion (Richard, 1972: 87). Even immersion class does not provide enough English exposure (Sampoerna Foundation 2004; Suara Merdeka 2004; Suara Merdeka 2005) though Krashen (1987) insisted in the importance of enough exposure or comprehensible input.

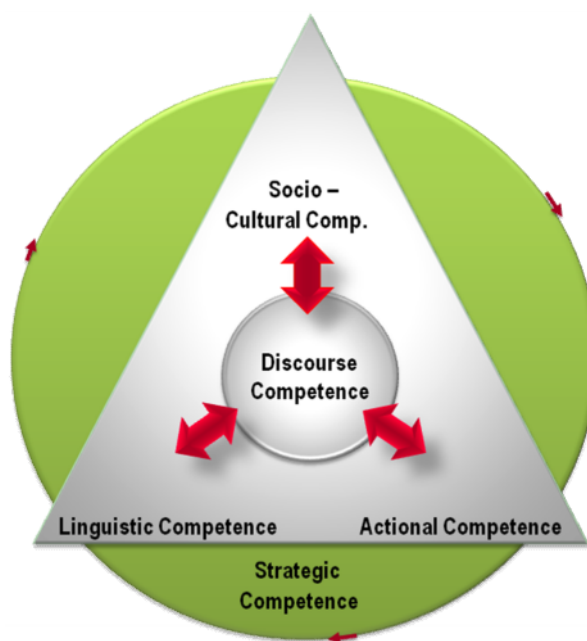
Competence

Competence refers to linguistic competence (Taylor 1988) or declarative knowledge (Færch and Kasper 1989; O'Malley and Chamot 1990). Murcia (1995) relates to communicative competence, which is supported by five different competences. They are briefly described as follows:

- (1) *Grammatical Competence* or *linguistic competence*: knowledge on language rules which covers such components as: syntax, morphology, lexicon, phonology, and orthography.
- (2) *Sociolinguistic Competence*: knowledge on sociocultural use of language which covers such socio-contextual factors as: participation, situation, style and culture.

- (3) *Discourse Competence*: knowledge on genre which covers such elements as: cohesion (reference, conjunction, lexicon), deixis (personal, spatial, temporal, textual), coherence and generic structure.
 - (4) *Strategic Competence*: knowledge on communication strategies which covers avoidance/reduction, achievement/compensatory (code switching, transfer), stalling/time-gaining (filler, gambit, cajoler, repeat), self-monitoring (repair), interactional (role in exchange) etc.
 - (5) *Actional Competence*: knowledge on language function which covers role in exchange.
- Those competences could be diagrammed as follows:

Figure 1: Communicative Competence Scheme



Those five competences which integrally develop a student's communicative competence that could prevent from a communication disruption are influenced by socio-cultural, linguistic, strategic, negotiation, speech function and discourse variables.

Error

Richards (1971) views error as the low elaboration of linguistic system and calls it transitional competence. This systematic error occurs because the learner is inexperienced to develop a hypothesis on the language rules, and is known as intralingual or developmental error. Error can be classified into four: overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions,

incomplete application of rules dan false concepts hypothesized. Srinivas (2005a) and Nemser (1971) view error as the learner's language development or approximative system, or idiosyncratic dialect (Corder 1973) or interlanguage (Brown 1994; Ellis 1995). In this case the learner simplifies the system of the target language. For instance, a learner may simply consider all verbs as transitive or intransitive that he/she tends to say *I am feeling thirsty* and *Don't worry. I am hearing him* for *I am thirsty* and *I hear him*.

The learner also tends to drop the article *a, an* or *the*, plural *s* dan and the simple past tense (Srinivas 2005c) as in:

- *It was Ø nice, nice trailer, Ø big one.*
- *I have many hundred carpenter(s) my own.*
- *I was in Frankfurt when I fill(ed) application.*

Selinker (1974), on the other hand, reports five processes central to second language learning: “*language transfer, transfer of training, strategies of second language learning, strategies of second language communication, and overgeneralization TL [Target Language] linguistic material.*”

METHOD

The research is qualitative and descriptive in nature. In case quantitative numbers are found, they simply facilitate the qualitative description. The data were collected with an elicitation technique and think-out-loud method (Johnstone 2006) from the twenty subjects (English students of the second semester) who were randomly selected by means of picking the students whose registered number is dividable by five. These twenty students were then asked to say about what they thought is good to say and were recorded and transcribed for further analysis.

With respect to the method of data analysis, three levels of analysis were employed, (1) recognizing or identifying the errors as found in every clause made by each subject of the research; (2) describing and categorizing the errors on the basis of their grammatical categories, their problem areas and semantic impacts, and error categories adapted from the error theoretical framework offered by Selinker (1974); finally (3) giving an account or interpretation on the causes the students performed errors.

FINDINGS

The subjects of this research performed errors under different grammatical categories. Among the elements of the grammatical errors six of them dominate over the others. Those are errors in producing verb phrase (24.6%) as in “*The task goal B is focus on form*” (Sbj1, U2), to infinitive (13.1%) as in “*I would like to presented to my audience*” (Sbj1, U1), past tense (12.3%) as in “*Several days ago I am sad, because I lost my spirit*” (Sbj19, U84), agreement between subject and finite (6.6%) as in “*She don’t have any difficulty*” (Sbj2, U8), agreement between number and noun (6.6%) as in “*I’ll give you ten minute to explain your work*” (Sbj12, U56) and derivation (5.7%) as in “*I think they have a good pronounce*” (Sbj6, U30). Table 1 totally demonstrates errors in different grammatical elements performed by the subjects.

Table 1: GRAMMATICAL CATEGORY

NO	GRAMMATICAL ELEMENT	F	%
1	To inf	16	13,1
2	Verb phrase	30	24.6
3	Ing form	1	0.8
4	Tense: past	15	12.3
5	Tense: pres	2	1.6
6	Passive	1	0.8
7	Relative clause	1	0.8
8	Derivation	7	5.7
9	Article	4	3.3
10	Conjunction	1	0.8
11	Preposition	5	4.1
12	Manner of quality	1	0.8
13	Choice of aux	1	0.8
14	Choice of word	6	5.0
15	Concord: finite	8	6.6
16	Concord: pronoun	4	3.3
17	Concord: plural	8	6.6
18	Word order: decl	5	4.1
19	Word order: interr	5	4.1
20	Word order: imper	1	0.8
		122	100

When we categorize the errors performed by the subjects of this research into their problem areas, we may find that their errors fall under such areas as syntax (78.7%) as in “*Well, they are can not answer the question*” (Sbj7, U32), morphology (15.6%) as in “*His name is Ana*” (Sbj9, U43) and lexicon (5.7%) as in “*I want to give you a question*” (Sbj15,

U68). Table 2 demonstrates the problem areas faced by the subjects of the research when they produced their utterances.

Table 2: PROBLEM AREAS

NO	ERROR AREA	F	%
1	Lexicon	7	5.7
2	Syntax	96	78.7
3	Morphology	19	15.6
		122	100

Under Selinker's error categories the subjects performed mostly two categories of error. First, they performed errors categorized as transfer of training and strategy of language learning as in "*I would like **to presented** to my audience*" (Sbj1, U1). This indicates that the utterances they produced are the results of their previous imperfect, incomplete and inappropriate language training and language learning. Such an error would not be performed if students were given complete and appropriate training and were provided with enough exposure of the use of to infinitive.

Second, they also performed many errors which can be categorized as language transfer as in "***Although** he is right **but** he must not say that*" (Sbj17, U77). Such an error typology occurs probably because the subjects, who are all Indonesians, are familiar with this phenomenon. Indonesian people seem to allow the conjunction *although* to go with the conjunction *but* in their Indonesian utterances. This phenomenon has unconsciously made them produce an English utterance which allows the conjunctions *although* and *but* in a single utterance, though it could be then labeled as an error of language transfer.

Table 3 below demonstrates Selinker's error categories performed by the subjects of the research.

Table 3: ERROR CATEGORY

NO	ERROR TYPOLOGY	F	%
1	Language transfer	21	17.2
2	Transfer of training / Strategy of language learning	94	77.1

3	Strategy of language communication	6	4.9
4	Overgeneralization	1	0.8
		122	100

Table 4 describes that the errors performed by the students did create significant local impact (92.6%) on the meaning of the utterances they produced. Though an error only influences locally the meaning of each utterance, it can create misunderstanding on the part of the interlocutor.

Table 4: SEMANTIC IMPACT

NO	IMPACT	F	%
1	Global	9	7.4
2	Local	113	92.6
		122	100

For examples, in the utterance “*I think that I will learn how to cook **with** my mommy*” (Sbj24, U118) the preposition *with* may affect the local meaning of the utterance and may create a bit confusion of whether the writer and her mommy who will learn how to cook or the writer’s mommy who will teach the writer how to cook. In the utterance “***His** name is **Ana***” (Sbj9, U43) the pronoun *his* may create a little confusion on the meaning of the part of the utterance because *his* does not agree with *Ana*, an Indonesia female name.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATION

Second language acquisition theory (Ellis 1995; Krashen 1987) suggests that students should be provided with enough comprehensible inputs that they can produce accepted and appropriate language. This means in a foreign language context, where comprehensible inputs are very rare, the learning and teaching process should facilitate them to exist. Students must be provided with good models of English, authentic materials and most importantly enough exposure of acceptable English language use.

The results of the research indicate that students encountered problems when they have to communicate their ideas in spoken English. Most of them performed very significant errors in verb phrase, to infinitive and past tense. Their errors are mostly related to syntax and create local semantic impacts. Their error typology falls under transfer of training or strategy of language learning and language transfer. This may imply that students tend to perform errors because of the following two main reasons: (1) their previous language training and learning were imperfect, incomplete and inappropriate. This condition can result in careless application of language rules, lack of linguistic competence and false concept of grammatical structures; (2) difficulties in communicating ideas in appropriate English that students tend to adopt the language rules from their own language.

The researcher, therefore, suggests that Unisbank lecturers should adopt the second language acquisition theory as an attempt to create a natural-like process of language acquisition in a learning context by providing good English models, enough exposure of comprehensible inputs, and authentic materials. This effort could be firstly experimented in a research or applied in an action research that the lecturers are convinced with the employed learning materials, methods and media which inherently support and develop students' literacy.

REFERENCES

- Agustien, Helena I.R. 1997. *Interlanguage Communication Strategies in Sustained Casual Conversations*. Unpublished Thesis. Sydney: Macquarie University.
- Bartlett, C. Craig. (2002). *Error Identification by Korean Teachers of English*. ELTED Vol. 6 Summer 68-81.
- Brown, H. 1994. *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall Regents.
- Departemen Pendidikan Nasional (Depenas). 2004. *Kurikulum 2004 Standar Kompetensi Mata Pelajaran Bahasa Inggris untuk SMA dan MA*. Jakarta.
- Ellis, R. 1995. *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Farooq, Mohammad Umar. (1998). *Contrastive and Error Analysis based Teaching Strategies*. Research Bulletin of Aichi Women's Junior College. General Education and Interdisciplinary Research.

- Færch, Claus and Kasper, Gabriele. 1983. *Strategies in Interlanguage Communication*. England: Longman Group Limited.
- Johnstone, Christopher J. et. al. 2006. *Using the Think Aloud Method (Cognitive Labs) To Evaluate Test Design for Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota.
- Krashen, Stephen D. 1987. *Principle and Practice in SLA*. UK: Prentice-Hall International.
- Mohideen, Haja. 1996. *ERROR ANALYSIS - Contributory Factors to Students' Errors, with Special Reference to Errors in Written English*. The English Teacher Vol. XXV October 1996
- Murcia, Marianne Celce; Dorney, Zoltan; Thurrell Sarah. 1995. *Communicative Competence: A Paedagogically, Motivated Model with Content Specifications, Issues in Applied Linguistics*. Vol. 6 No 2, pp. 5-35
- Nemser, William. 1971. *Approximative System of Foreign language Learners*. IRAL, Vol. IX/2, May 1972. Hidelberg: Julius Groos Verlag
- O'Malley, J. Michael and Chamot, Ana Uhl. 1990. *Learning Strategies in SLA*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, Jack C. 1971. *A Non-Contrastive Approach to Error Analysis*. *English Language Teaching*, Vol. 25, 3, June 1991. London: Oxford University Press.
- Richards, Jack C. 1972. *Social Factors, Interlanguage, and Language Learning*. *Language Learning*, XXII.2, 1972.
- Sampoerna Foundation. Minggu, 12 September 2004. Tergagap di Kelas Istimewa. <<http://www.sampoernafoundation.org/consert/view/235/103/lang.id/>> (4 Maret 2008).
- Selinker, Larry. 1972. *Interlanguage*. IRAL, Vol. X/3, 1972. Hidelberg: Julius Groos Verlag
- Selinker, L. 1974. 'Interlanguage'. In Richards, J. (Ed.). *Error analysis: Perspectives on Second Language Acquisition*. 31-54. Essex: Longman.
- Srinivas, Ranganayaki. 2005a. *Approximative System*. <<http://www.teachingstylesonline.com/approximativesystem.htm>> (9 Maret 2008).
- Srinivas, Ranganayaki. 2005b. *Idiosyncratic Dialect*. <<http://www.teachingstylesonline.com/idiosyncraticdialect.htm>> (9 Maret 2008).
- Srinivas, Ranganayaki. 2005c. *Selinker and Jean D'Souza on Interlanguage*. <<http://www.teachingstylesonline.com/selinkerandjeand'souza.htm>> (9 Maret 2008).
- Srinivas, Ranganayaki. 2005d. *Stages of Error Analysis*. <<http://www.teachingstylesonline.com/stagesoferroranalysis.htm>> (9 Maret 2008).

- Srinivas, Ranganayaki. 2005e. *Transitional Competence*. <<http://www.teachingstylesonline.com/transitionalcompetence.htm>> (9 Maret 2008).
- Suara Merdeka. Sabtu, 14 Agustus 2004. Pengajar, Kendala Terbesar Kelas Imersi. <<http://www.suaramerdeka.com/harian/0408/14/kot15.htm>> (4 Maret 2008).
- Suara Merdeka. Selasa, 28 Juni 2005. *Kelas Imersi terkendala Kemampuan Guru*. <<http://www.suaramerdeka.com/harian/0506/28/kot13.htm>> (4 Maret 2008).
- Taylor, David S. 1988. *The meaning and Use of the Term "Competence" in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics*. Applied Linguistics, Vol. 9 No. 2. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wells, B. 1987. *Apprenticeship in Literacy*. Dalam Interchange 18, 1 / 2: 109-123.